

**DISASTER GIPSIES:
THE ROLE OF INFORMAL RELATIONSHIPS
IN ADMINISTERING DISASTER ASSISTANCE***

Thomas R. Forrest

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA

The importance of interpersonal relationships for affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency management practices is examined in this paper. A case study of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) reservists, part time FEMA employees called to help administer federal disaster assistance programs, illustrates the significance of an informal organization in augmenting formal bureaucratic procedures. Interview and survey data come from a pilot study conducted in the aftermath of tornadoes which swept through North and South Carolina in 1984. Nicknamed "disaster gypsies," FEMA reservists develop a strong sense of community or camaraderie among themselves as a result of their intense disaster involvement. This sense of community or informal organization is an unintended consequence of four factors: organizational demands, physical setting, sense of mission and a post-disaster altruistic community. The informal organization has implications for emergency management practices. It facilitates needed organizational flexibility and improvisation, helps train and integrate new personnel, provides an additional channel of communication and lessens job related stress. Future research should systematically examine the role informal relationships have on affecting delivery of emergency services. Such research would complement and provide a missing dimension to present efforts to conceptualize group and organizational emergence.

* The author would like to acknowledge the comments and suggestions provided by Ira W. Hutchison and George S. Rent along with the support received from a small grant given by the Office of Grants and Contracts, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Considerable attention has been given to formal organizational aspects of administering disaster assistance. This attention includes examining formal authority and communication patterns, division of labor, task allocation, formal policies and procedures and interorganizational relationships (Mileti, et al., 1975; Quarantelli and Dynes, 1977; Kreps, 1984). Recently Drabek (1985) suggested that to improve the quality of emergency management planners should also consider "... improvisation and the strengths inherent in interpersonal ties..." (p. 18) when creating a rational emergency response system. All organized responses to disasters are essentially a composite of individuals who bring their time, energy and talents to bear on some coordinated task. Yet, it should not be forgotten that organizational participants "... are never merely hired hands but they bring along their heads and hearts..." (Scott, 1981:83). Spontaneous informal friendships develop among organizational participants to meet social and emotional needs. These relationships are important. This paper presents a case study illustrating how interpersonal relationships among those who administer disaster assistance affect the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency management practices.

The focus of attention is on a group of part time employees of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the United States known officially as FEMA reservists and given the unofficial nickname "disaster gypsies." The term "disaster gypsy" has a dubious yet interesting history. It was first used fifteen to twenty years ago to describe both legitimate building contractors as well as dishonest "con-artists" who moved from disaster to disaster offering their services to victims. Often, reputable contractors who perform needed housing repairs, would be hired by HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development, at the time the federal agency responsible for emergency housing services). Official public warning would be issued against dishonest "con-artists" who demanded advance payment for work never to be completed. Today the term "disaster gypsy" does not have the same pejorative connotation as its earlier usage. Instead, it has been adopted by some as a nickname to describe FEMA reservists and to reflect the transitory nature of their work.

A strong sense of community or camaraderie develops among reservists as a result of their intense involvement in helping administer federal assistance programs. In turn these close interpersonal relationships help mitigate personal frustrations, tensions and stress. Relationships also help maintain high

motivation and morale, and facilitate achievement of organizational objectives. These relationships are often referred to as the informal structure of an organization and have long been identified as important components of formal complex organizations (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Caplow, 1964; Blau, 1974; Scott, 1981). Yet, little direct attention has been given to the role these relationships have in affecting overall organizational effectiveness in a disaster context.

An informal structure may have both negative and positive consequences for an organization. For instance, if organizational participants are selfish, uncooperative, excessively competitive and lack morale and motivation, they might covertly undermine administrative personnel and decisions. This results in undermining organizational objectives. Yet, disaster situations are unique working environments most often characterized by cooperative and altruistic behavior, and collective commitment to organizational objectives (Barton, 1970). For this reason the following discussion focuses primarily on positive consequences of the informal structure. However, in discussions implications for emergency management activities, some problematic aspects will also be identified.

Research Design

Data for this case study of FEMA reservists come from a pilot study conducted in the aftermath of devastating tornados which swept through the states of North and South Carolina on March 28, 1984. Twenty-five (25) tape-recorded interviews were conducted with FEMA reservists lasting between fifteen minutes to over one hour. The exploratory nature of the research necessitated interviews be semi-structured, with a premium placed on maintaining flexibility and preserving a maximum degree of ingenuity and improvisation in the interview situation. This flexibility allowed for reformulating and modifying analytical categories.

To augment the interview data a small survey was administered to 60 reservists. This survey focused on basic demographic data, motivations for being a reservist and included an assessment of perceived levels of personal and organizational stress and mechanisms employed to reduce such stress. In addition three interviews were conducted with national FEMA personnel in Washington. Each person was closely involved and knowledgeable of the reservists' program. Despite restrictions inherent in a pilot exploratory study, there is reason for confidence that the descriptive interview data supplemented by survey data

and interviews with national FEMA personnel reinforce the argument set forth. What follows is a discussion that illustrates how social-emotional factors can impact the administration of disaster assistance programs.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

FEMA was created by Presidential Reorganization Order No 3 in 1979. It was designed to be the central contact point in the federal government for a wide range of emergency management activities e.g., planning, mitigation, response and recovery in both peace and war (McLoughlin, 1985). To carry out this role 10 regional offices were established. One function of each regional office is to administer a Disaster Assistance Programs Division. While the nature of this unique organizational structure is discussed shortly, it is important to note here that the concept of a reserve force of disaster assistance employees became part of the formal, federal disaster assistance policy in 1975/1976, prior to the establishment of FEMA. While federal disaster assistance programs have undergone numerous organizational changes, the concept of a reserve work force remains, expanding from 500 in 1978 to over 2,000 individuals in 1985 (see McLoughlin, 1985, for organizational changes). These reservists are spread throughout all 10 FEMA regions with each regional office being responsible for their recruiting and training as well as for assembling and managing reservists during an actual disaster response.

A detailed identification of the range of task activities performed by FEMA reservists is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, a brief overview will provide sufficient introduction. In response to a Presidential disaster declaration, FEMA reservists are contacted, mobilized and sent to the disaster site to help establish and staff both a disaster Field Office (DFO) and Disaster Assistance Centers (DAC's). The DFO is the central coordinating center where applications for assistance are processed, public information is dispensed, progress reports are written and forwarded to regional and national FEMA headquarters, along with a host of other tasks necessary for a smoothly functioning organization. Of particular note is the temporary housing program which, in most disasters, is the most involved and longest term assistance program. DAC's are designed to be one-stop centers where victims can apply for all qualified disaster assistance programs. Working closely with state personnel, a Federal Coordinating Officer is appointed who is a full time FEMA employee. This person assembles a

staff of permanent full time FEMA employees, reservists and local hirees to coordinate and administer federal disaster assistance programs. These programs are designed to provide assistance to individuals, businesses, farmers, and state and local governments suffering disaster related losses.

Essential to the relief operation is the establishment of DAC's which are conveniently located in affected communities. Managed and staffed by reservists DAC's usually operate for a week or so, until all victims are processed. Reservists will then either return home or transfer to the DFO where applications for assistance are processed. It is hard to capture the intensity of this work environment particularly during the initial formation phase when 16-18 hour work days are often the rule. It is within this intensive and cooperative work context that a latent social organization emerges as a "sense of community" among the reservists.

Disaster Gypsy/FEMA Reservist

What sort of individual becomes a reservist or "disaster gypsy"? Perhaps the only common characteristic shared by FEMA reservists is their ability to drop what they are doing and go at a moment's notice to a disaster area. Consequently, those who become reservists tend to be retired or semi-retired, ex-military who retire early, self-employed, financially independent, or employed in temporary work situations allowing for a quick shift into disaster assistance employment. Many reservists were themselves victims of disasters and initially were recruited by FEMA as "local hirees" to augment the reservist staff. Capable and effective local hirees are identified and recruited to join the pool of FEMA reservists available for a given regional office.

No official information exists describing reservists. However, the 60 reservists who participated in this study provided some "general" demographic information. Of the 60, 35 (58%) were women; 25 (42%) were men. Over half (51%) fell between the ages 30-49, while 35% were over 50. In terms of marital status, 43% were separated, divorced or single; while 56% were married. As a group the educational level was relatively high with 60% having either a baccalaureate degree or a graduate/professional degree. No one had less than twelve years of education and only eight designated a high school diploma as their final degree. Reservists divided evenly between those with limited disaster experience (52%), defined as fewer than five disasters; while 48% have worked more than 5 disasters. Of this latter group fifteen individuals (25%) had worked between six to ten disasters with four individuals reporting having worked 26 or more

disasters. One person estimated having experience in over 60 disasters.

It is hard to make many generalizations about reservists except that in this group they tended to be predominantly middle-aged, highly educated and free to travel. One generalization which can be made is that reservists tend to have limited commitments in their private lives. This is reflected in numerous comments made in interviews as well as in the large proportion of individuals either separated, divorced or single; as well as to those married and living in unsatisfactory relationships. Constant references and jokes are made as to how hard this type of work is on marriages and to the high divorce rate. Ironically, part of the attraction for being a reservist (argued later) is found in the interpersonal intensity and connectedness experienced between reservists working in a disaster setting. It might be hypothesized that these "disaster relationships" provide compensation for limited everyday commitments.

Disaster Context

Something unusual happens to a community that has been struck by a disaster. Normal social divisions break down, conflicts temporarily dissolve and the community exists for a period of time within an abundance of personal warmth and direct help (Barton, 1970:207). This post-disaster transformation has been noted by many disaster researchers over the years (Wolfenstein, 1957; Fritz, 1961; Barton, 1970; Zurcher et al., 1970; Dynes, 1974) and produces a new value and normative framework within which people act and make judgements (Fritz, 1961:683).

Barton (1970) labeled this transformation as the emergence of an "altruistic community." This "altruistic community" is important because it is within this new normative context that FEMA reservists arrive to organize and staff federal emergency assistance programs. While reservists create their own separate sense of community, this altruistic environment facilitates quick establishment of working relationships. This altruistic environment allows for the suppression of traditional bureaucratic procedures and encourages timely decision-making, rapid resource mobilization and greater interorganizational cooperation. While substantial empirical evidence exists supporting the emergence of an "altruistic community," this is not to say that all post-impact disaster situations are free from conflict. Occasionally long term grudges, personality clashes and political and jurisdictional disputes will surface. However, open conflict

is more the exception than the rule. In sum, it is suggested that for reservists the post-disaster altruistic environment is conducive to facilitating a set of close interpersonal relationships and provides a context for meaningful and satisfying work.

Emergent Informal Relationships

As mentioned earlier, these informal relationships among reservists are typically referred to as the "informal organization" or "informal structure" of a complex organization. These relationships are "... conceived of as being the aspects of organizations that are not formally planned but that more or less spontaneously evolve from the needs of people" (Scott, 1981:82-83). Because this informal structure is loosely organized, flexible, ill-defined and not easily identifiable, it tends to be a shadow of the formal organization whose importance is often overlooked. When FEMA reservists arrive at a disaster site what essentially occurs is the emergence of both a formal and informal organizational structure. The formal structure is the rational bureaucratic pre-planned structure which evolves within the contingencies of a specific disaster. Emergence of an informal organization is a synthesis of past disaster relationships and newly acquired friendships which form to meet basic needs for affiliation.

Mobilization

When a major disaster occurs individual reservists begin monitoring the news media and remain flexible in their social and work commitments in order to leave at a moment's notice. Depending on when a presidential declaration is made, this waiting can last from a few hours to perhaps a week from the initial disaster occurrence. The declaration authorizes FEMA reservists to proceed to the disaster site. Once notified and prior to arrival at a disaster site, experienced reservists begin mentally preparing by reviewing briefing books which detail job assignments and organizational procedures.

With the declaration or pending declaration of a disaster, there also exists the expectation of renewing old friendships. A FEMA employee responsible for activating reservists stated that almost to the person one of the first questions asked by a reservist is: "Who else is going to be there?" Reservists often describe going to a disaster as going to a family reunion where previous friendships are renewed and new friendships are

anticipated. The following quotes from reservists give some sense of this camaraderie.

You know, the staff know each other. Reservists come from all regions. There is a mix of people going in all directions... it's like going to a family reunion.

It's like old home week. See the same people from disaster to disaster.

The nature of these friendships provides a strong motivation to go to a new disaster situation. Knowing a particular friend from a distant state will be there adds extra incentive to participate.

Working/Living Environment

Arrival at a disaster site entails settling into a new working/living environment. Accommodations for reservists are generally found at local motels and hotels near the disaster field office (DFO). One criterion for determining selection of the DFO site is not only its proximity to the disaster site but also the availability of staff housing. Initially the intensity of work demands i.e., setting up the DFO and the Disaster Assistance Centers (DAC's), requires everyone's total waking energy. With time, normal work routines emerge and the fusing of work and leisure begins to take place. Sharing meals and drinks, attending movies, shopping, sightseeing, and celebrating birthdays and anniversaries are done in the company of other reservists.

Within this working/living setting, relationships which are often described by reservists as "family," begin to emerge. The strength of these interpersonal commitments repeatedly surfaced in the interviews.

These people here (reservists) are just like my family. I am closer to them than I am to my family in a lot of ways. You know, when I leave here...I leave my family and go home to my dependents.

...disaster workers have even more than community, it is a sense of family for many people. It's terribly strong for some. Those who have been here for a long time (worked many disasters over the years), they are really supportive. They do things for each other that family would normally do. For example, big birthday celebrations.

Reservists really feel for each other. It (disasters) causes a togetherness. Workers develop a sense of community...more like family. You confide in each other. You are a close knit group. It's rewarding. There is a lot of after hours contact...going to dinner and having drinks.

These close working relationships also facilitate the early

organizational emergence at the DFO. The pressure to respond immediately at the disaster site is intense, leaving little time for normal pleasantries associated with assembling a new task oriented group. Reservists know one another's talents, personalities and leadership abilities which in turn conserves valuable time and energy when establishing the initial work structure. As one very experienced reservist stated:

You got the finest bunch of people you could ever work with. It would put them up against any work group in any part of the country. I guess we are a unique bunch. We all know one another...we know how each one will react to certain things. They know how I'm going to react. This allows for instant organization to happen.

Close relationships in the context of this working/living environment makes the distinction between work and leisure unclear. Unlike an ordinary work setting where people return home to family and friends in different surroundings, reservists return to nearby hotel/motel rooms surrounded by the same people with whom they have spent their work day. It is hard to escape work. As one reservist stated:

A lot of work gets done after hours. You go into a bar or restaurant and sit down and start talking work.

Long hours and the emotional and physical intensity of the work create stress and strain for many reservists. The role that friendships have in alleviating this job related stress and frustration was particularly noted by women reservists. Whereas men would cite physical exercise, drink or solitary withdrawal as a coping mechanism for stress, women would mention the role that friendships played. The following three statements from women reservists illustrate this point.

People are very caring about each other..."Can I get you something, bring you food?" There is a lot of mutual monitoring of each other...looking out for one another. I see more of this with the women than I do the men.

When things get tense I go over to housing (another department) where there are two or three people I trust. They are away from what I am doing. I rant and rave with them...we act as each other's therapist.

It's the people around you that take care of you...take you home (hotel/motel) and just give you T.L.C. (Tender Loving Care). parenthesis mine.

A feeling of belonging, sharing values and goals are important elements associated with establishing close interpersonal ties. Values and goals which are shared in this disaster context center around desire to help others. Giving freely of one's talents, doing meaningful work which has tangible results (i.e., leaving

people and communities better off than when you arrived) is often cited as a major personal satisfaction and reason for remaining a reservist. As one reservist commented:

I remain a reservist because I enjoy it. It's very ego building to think you are helping people. You can see your skills used to the ultimate. In addition they are appreciated. You get immediate satisfaction. You can really see what you are doing is really making an important impact on people's lives.

In discussing who becomes a reservist many reservists mention that it is often people who do not have close personal ties in their normal daily lives e.g., the recently divorced or separated, those in unsatisfactory marriages, those wanting to get away from something and/or someone. Being a reservist offers an experience of being a member of a close knit community, a sense of connectedness...albeit, a limited, short term, commitment. Yet, this brief sense of community is sufficient enough to appreciate and sense that such a feeling has indeed been experienced. In responding to the question: "What kind of person becomes a reservist?", one reservist stated:

People who are adventurist. People who can take on the unknown...people who care. People who don't care don't last long, it shows in their work. There is a degree of non-commitment somewhere in their lives. People are running away.

Another comments:

It's a lot of work, but also a lot of fun. People become a whole other person when they get here. People use this as an escape.

The question remains...from what are they running? At this point only speculations can be offered. Perhaps there are issues of alienation, disconnectedness, meaningless work, unfulfilling relationships or just wanting a break in routine. However, it might be more meaningful to ask the question: what are they escaping to? That is, are they really seeking a greater feeling of belonging, of connectedness which draws them to return? Knowledge that the work is important, meaningful and appreciated heightens personal satisfaction. What is gained by reservists is an experience of being a member of a close transient community--a community which forms and dissolves only to re-form in another disaster context. It is sharing altruistic values and goals and knowing that who you are and what you do does indeed matter to other people. While reservists are paid, most place remuneration as a secondary factor in maintaining their involvement in the reservist program.

Facilitating Factors

This "sense of community" or informal organization which emerges among reservists is not an intentional act but rather an unintended consequence of several factors coalescing at a given place and time. Four factors are identified as providing the context for facilitating the emergence of these exceptionally close relationships. These factors are organizational demands, physical setting, sense of mission and a post-disaster altruistic community.

Organizational Demands

The very existence of reservists is a direct result of FEMA's need for a flexible organizational structure which can periodically expand and respond to demands for delivering disaster assistance. When the disaster is over the structure must be able to contract to a more cost-effective and efficient non-crisis organization.

Disasters are unpredictable and surrounded by uncertainty. While there is an identifiable "disaster season," (starting with spring floods and tornados and continuing into the summer and fall hurricane season) many disasters such as earthquakes, forest fires, snow emergencies, volcanic disruptions, or explosions are not as predictable. Responding to subsequent demands for federal disaster assistance necessitates a certain organizational elasticity. Creating a reserve cadre of workers who can be immediately deployed to a disaster site is one attempt by FEMA to build in structural flexibility.

Physical Setting

The nature of organizing, staffing and delivering federal disaster assistance programs requires that the organization locate near the disaster site. In this setting reservists are freed from daily maintenance activities such as cooking, cleaning, mowing lawns, they are able to concentrate their full energy on disaster related tasks. When reservists leave work they do not return home but back to motels and hotels where events of the day are shared over drinks and dinner. Interpersonal bonds are forged as a result of sharing tangible worthwhile work and witnessing individuals, families and a community gradually begin to be restored as a result of their collective effort. Because reservists are also cut off from their own familiar surroundings and relationships they tend to turn to one another for mutual support and friendship heightening their sense of community.

Sense of Mission

A common commitment to help disaster victims gives an

external focus which helps unify the group. The urgency of disaster victims' needs and the intensity of their loss (e.g., death of family, friends; loss of home, business and all that was once familiar) creates an environment for selfless behavior on the part of relief workers. This urgency reinforces a sense of mission and zeal that helps maintain the collective commitment to helping people. The tasks associated with delivering assistance such as arranging for temporary housing, loans for repairing or rebuilding damaged houses and business, and food assistance, are seen as important worthwhile goals. Work is challenging, intense and stressful and the hours are long. There is an urgency which stimulates adrenalin and gives a fever pitch to the activities. Reservists are there to help. The sense of mission inherent in the nature of the tasks and post-disaster environment acts to facilitate and unify an unusually close set of relationships.

Post-Disaster Altruistic Community

Disasters force people to pull together, to set aside personal self-interests and petty daily differences and to engage in a collective effort to restore the stricken community. As mentioned earlier, Barton (1970) and others have called this post-disaster transformation the emergence of an "altruistic community." While the concept makes specific reference to the relationships between disaster survivors, this heightened sense of community spills over to reinforcing positive relationships between disaster victims and those who offer assistance in most disasters. For reservists, particularly those who work in the DAC's processing applications for assistance and actually talking and sharing experiences with victims, a certain empathy and human connectedness is felt.

A by-product of this post-disaster transformation is that cumbersome bureaucratic responses are often cut short. What sometimes would take six weeks to arrange can be arranged within minutes with a few well-placed phone calls. In a post-disaster setting, few want to be perceived as needlessly interfering or being non-cooperative. The magnitude and urgency of the situation places pressures on everyone to be as cooperative as possible. This heightened organizational and interpersonal cooperation contributes to the job satisfaction achieved by reservists. Reservists gain a sense of control in that the tasks they are doing often lead to rapid and tangible results. The cooperative atmosphere reflects common values and goals shared in the immediate post-impact period. For FEMA reservists the effects of working in this post-disaster altruistic environment reinforces their own intergroup experience of good will and interpersonal connectedness.

For reservists the most salient aspect of their job is definitely linked to the job satisfaction achieved by helping people and communities in distress. Indeed the depth and intensity of these feelings were so pronounced as to trigger their identification as a critical dimension contributing to effective delivery of disaster relief services. In addition, having a job that has a clear beginning and end gives reservists a sense of completion which is seldom found in most work settings.

Implications for Emergency Management and Future Research

The irony of these informal relationships is that they are not subject to management control. Management can do little either to prevent or abolish their existence. However, an effective management strategy would be to utilize these informal relationships for achievement of organizational objectives. In the case of FEMA's response to emergencies the formal bureaucratic rules, regulations and procedures create a rational organizational structure for delivering disaster assistance. The informal relationships among reservists create cohesiveness and teamwork which enhances job satisfaction, fosters human understanding and maintains high motivation in a way the formal FEMA structure is unable to do. While the emphasis of this paper has been on the positive consequences that informal relationships have for the formal structure, nevertheless there are some negative and problematic implications. To provide a more balanced and realistic assessment of how these informal relationships affect emergency management activities, the following discussion will also identify some potential negative consequences.

(1) Informal relationships among reservists directly facilitates needed organizational flexibility and improvisation which is prerequisite for a versatile and effective delivery of disaster assistance. FEMA relies on reservists to staff the DFO and DAC's. Each new disaster sees the emergence of a new temporary and operational organization. While a physical location for the DFO and DAC's must be designated, equipment and supplies trucked into the area and a staff assembled, having temporary employees familiar with each other allows for a rapid mobilization of an operating work organization.

Among reservists there is an excitement in seeing old friends and reestablishing relationships. These previous relationships greatly facilitate a rapid emergence of the formal operating structure. Because of past experiences reservists know the strengths, weaknesses and talents of each other and can quickly

allocate tasks and develop cooperative relationships. Time pressures and urgency of the physical situation does not permit the luxury of normal socializing. These close relationships "oil the wheels" for FEMA management by helping establish a rapid, fully functioning organization within a day or two.

While facilitating rapid emergence of a formal operating structure, these informal relationships may also slow down the initial mobilization process. Often reservists will request that they be assigned with a particular friend. If possible some effort is made to accommodate reservists personal requests. But the ultimate demands of a specific disaster and the organizational needs supersede individual preferences. Nevertheless, valuable time and energy is often spent trying to accommodate individual reservists.

(2) While regional FEMA offices provide limited formal training for reservists, much of the practical training is on-the-job. Again close relationships among reservists augment formal attempts at training and integrating new members. New reservists quickly pick up valuable work information over drinks and dinner and in other informal settings. Experienced reservists make a conscious effort to integrate inexperienced persons. A willingness to answer questions, share past experiences and provide a sympathetic ear--all help make a new reservist part of the work team.

Informal attempts at training cannot totally compensate for lack of formal training. There is an unevenness in the training, expertise and experience of reservists. Not all reservists are well trained nor current regarding disaster relief policies and procedures. This lack of information and training can affect the accuracy of information dispensed to disaster victims. These errors may cause increased aggravation and hardships to persons already having difficulty coping with the devastation they have experienced. To have an effective reservist program FEMA must insure that reservists are adequately trained and kept current of all relevant policy and procedural changes. Active communication and training exercises between disasters is essential.

(3) Reservists assigned leadership positions often comment that they receive little management training. Leadership assignments tend to vary from disaster to disaster. An individual assigned a leadership role will often hesitate to exercise authority over other reservists because of the possibility that in the next disaster they too may find themselves in a subordinate position. This reluctance to perform management tasks is exacerbated by the close relationships existing among reservists. The informal

organization structure does not facilitate leadership and authority distinctions among reservists.

(4) Formal organizations have established channels of communication such as memos, reports and staff meetings. Nevertheless, an additional channel of communication exists within the interpersonal network existing among reservists. Negative stereotypes exist about office grapevines as false rumor mills. However, informal relationships in a work situation characterized by high personal job commitment, motivation and morale can help transmit and accurately interpret crucial information. In a disaster, events change rapidly and information becomes dated. The sheer volume of information is difficult to process. Informal relationships can facilitate transmission of up-to-date information when formal channels are burdened.

(5) An important function provided by informal relationships is the lessening of job related frustration, stress and strain. Acting as a "release valve" (particularly for women) these relationships provide a sympathetic conversation, a shoulder on which to cry, or someone with whom to share dinner, drinks or a movie. Relationships provide, in short, a basic human connection and sense of solidarity that helps keep problems in perspective. This is particularly important when people are separated from normal sources of emotional and social support. Finding positive releases from tensions and stress allow reservists to devote singular energy to the tasks at hand.

(6) The sense of community or camaraderie experienced by reservists contribute significantly to high morale and job satisfaction. Both help create committed workers. For FEMA to have an elastic organizational structure that is capable of rapid expansion and contraction this temporary work force is essential. To insure a continued pool of experienced reservists to staff subsequent disaster operations, FEMA must foster a work environment that leads to high job satisfaction. While economic rewards cannot be overlooked, most reservists underscore the significance of socio-emotional rewards--gained from both the nature of the work as well as the interpersonal relationships--for sustaining their continued involvement in the FEMA reservist program.

Those responsible for emergency management ought not to underestimate the importance of informal relationships. As the preceding information suggests, emergency managers who are fully aware of informal relationships can develop strategies

which will utilize more fully these relationships for achieving organizational objectives.

Future disaster research should systematically examine the role informal relationships have on affecting delivery of emergency services. For instance, such research would complement and provide a missing dimension to the present effort to conceptualize group and organizational emergence. Current research emphasizes classifying emergence in terms of formal structural properties e.g., norms, tasks, formal relationships, degree of structural complexity and permanence (Drabek, 1985). Yet, as this case study demonstrates, the emergence of a set of informal relationships is a crucial dimension in any prolonged organized disaster response. It is this dimension that acknowledges the importance of basic social and emotional needs of organizational participants whether in a crisis or non-crisis setting.

References

- Barton, A. H.
1970 *Communities in Disaster*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor.
- Blau, P. M.
1974 *On the Nature of Organizations*. New York: Wiley.
- Caplow, T.
1964 *Principles of Organization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.
- Drabek, T. E.
1985 "A Typology of Disaster-Induced Emergency Systems". A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Washington, D.C.
- Dynes, R. R.
1974 *Organized Behavior in Disaster*. Newark, Delaware: Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware.
- Fritz, C. E.
1961 "Disaster." Pp. 651-694 in R.K. Merton and R.A. Nisbet (eds.) *Contemporary Social Problems*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.

- Kreps, G. A.
1984 "Sociological Inquiry and Disaster Research." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10:309-330.
- McLoughlin, D.
1985 "A Framework for Integrated Emergency Management." *Public Administration Review*, 45:165-172.
- Mileti, D. S., T. E. Drabek and J. E. Haas
1975 *Human Systems and Extreme Environments*. Boulder: Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado.
- Quarantelli, E. L., and R. R. Dynes
1977 "Response to Social Crisis and Disasters." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 3:23-49.
- Roethlisberger, F. J., and W. J. Dickson
1939 *Management and the Worker*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Scott, R. W.
1981 *Organizations: Rational, Natural and Open Systems*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Wolfenstein, M.
1975 *Disaster*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Zurcher, Louis A., W. H. Kay and J. B. Taylor
1970 *Tornado: A Community Responds to Disaster*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.